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REVIEWS

POTS AND PANS, OR STUDIES IN STILL-LIFE PAINTING. BY ARTHUR EDWIN
BYE. 8°, 236 PP., 93 FIGS. PRINCETON, PRINCETON UNIVERSITY PRESS.
1921. \$6.00.

Dr. Bye, a painter of still-life himself, has given us under the simple but attractive title, *Pots and Pans*, a fascinating introduction to the study of still-life painting. He begins by granting us the case against still-life as being a minor branch of painting. This takes us off our guard immediately, and before he closes his first chapter, *The Historic Prejudice*, we are unwittingly convinced that still-life is not only a significant but also a most attractive branch of painting, the prejudice against which is the grossest philistinism. He is even able indirectly to accuse the late Kaiser of it.

The sporadic development of still-life during the Renaissance is lightly sketched in the second chapter. The author's style of writing is so iridescent in detail that one takes keen satisfaction in each episode as it appears. Then we come to the kernel of the book in the chapter on Dutch and Flemish still-life painting of the seventeenth century. This important movement is treated from the standpoint of subject. The names given to the different kinds of still-life pictures are very apt: pots and pans, trophies of the hunt, fruit and flowers, herring and wine. The last mentioned, a type of pictures favored particularly by the Haarlem painters of the seventeenth century, are breakfast pieces. But since the patent breakfast cereal has taken possession of the American imagination, the author has done well to go into details. After the discussion of Dutch and Flemish painting follows an interlude of a few pages in which four still-life painters of Spain are mentioned. Then the development of still-life in France from the eighteenth century to the present is traced. A chapter, based mainly on Fenollosa, is devoted to Chinese and Japanese still-life. The final two chapters are the most valuable and interesting in the book, dealing as they do with a subject peculiarly

familiar to Dr. Bye, the work of modern Dutch and American painters.

The book as a whole is not historical, in spite of its historical plan, but critical. The criticism, too, is quite unusual. The chief emphasis does not center upon discovering the antecedents of each painter's style nor upon describing the painter's reaction to his medium, although both of these things come out clearly. The fundamental point of approach is, rather, the analysis of the objects painted and the study of the extent to which each painter has mastered their characteristic qualities. Dr. Bye grows enthusiastic over the advantages of the still-life painter in dealing with his objects: "he can place them where he will, by the sunlit window, or in the shadowy corner of the room, *and there they have to stay*. No passing clouds will alter them, no new day will destroy their first effect; no varying moods can change their face. Only a few still-life subjects are deceptive like a summer day or a maiden's face; flowers will fade, and fish will decay; these are the exceptions we must have as with any rule." The book is characterized throughout by the great zest with which the author regards the objects to which the still-life painter gives his attention. "To catch," he writes, "the evanescence of poppies, the delicacy of roses or the subtlety of morning glories, the pure decorative quality of foxgloves, camellias or peonies is a pursuit worthy of every effort." The possibilities of fish evoke the following paragraph: "When one comes to think of it, fish are the most paintable objects in nature. Their fluid quality, their sliminess, their lustre, their brilliancy of color lend themselves most readily to the art of a painter in oils. Not that they are easy to paint—on the contrary, it requires the utmost dexterity of brushwork to obtain their fresh and shimmering sheen. And it cannot be done by prolonged, laborious work. A dead fish loses its fishiness on long acquaintance, while at the same time it gains other qualities we need not mention." This enthusiasm does not abandon the author when he turns from the objects to the pictures. But it does not imply uncritical praise or blame. The following excerpts from his appraisal of Fantin-Latour are typical: "No

matter how exciting the motley of red and pink and purple may appear, the surrounding grey gives rest. So that his vase of flowers is like a rich jewel against the velvet of a woman's dress, or a stained glass window within the gloom of a cathedral. The flowers are as vibrant sparkles of light out of the sombreness of a dull sky. This is the secret of Fantin-Latour, and this is why Geffroy could write, 'The smallest canvas of Fantin-Latour is a scheme where nothing is lacking to constitute a definite decoration.' . . . Decorative Fantin's still-lives may be, but in the sense that a bit of jewelry is decorative, and they remind one most of the mosaic brooches of the late Victorian age."

Pots and Pans is unlike the art literature which we are accustomed to see produced in America. It is not a biographical work written for reference, nor a book of attributions written for profit. It is meant to be read and it will be read by those who are fortunate enough to possess it. It represents a type of book common enough on the Continent, where the enjoyment of art is not confined to collectors. In particular, it is an enviable product of Professor Mather's influence at Princeton.

The author deserves congratulation for hitting upon such a virgin and fertile subject. As this is the first book in its field, it is not astonishing that there have been some considerable omissions. The exclusion of recent German still-life painting is unfortunate. Some mention might well have been made of the still-life painting of antiquity: we have ample evidence of its popularity, which continued into Early Christian times; in fact, among the most popular subjects were still-lives, the famous *asarota*. Still-life found its way into mediæval illumination, and it is surprising that the influence of the manuscripts upon the Renaissance painters is not taken more into account by Dr. Bye. As he implies, another influence upon early still-life painting, that of sign painting, is now difficult for us to measure. It is tempting to venture the hypothesis, however, that our first Renaissance painter of full-fledged still-life, Jacopo de' Barbari, may have taken his departure from sign painting. For anyone who has travelled in the region between Nuremberg and Venice will remember that parts of it have still retained

the houses and customs of Jacopo's time and that luscious still-life sign boards are a striking local peculiarity.

These are but minor points. The essence of the matter is that we have in *Pots and Pans* a book of genuine, independent criticism. There is room on our library shelves for books of this kind on each of the branches of painting.

John Shapley

THE PRINCIPLES OF AESTHETICS. BY DEWITT H. PARKER. 8°, 374 PP.
BOSTON, SILVER, BURDETT & CO., 1920. \$2.50.

For general college use *The Principles of Æsthetics* by Parker is the most satisfactory English text-book on æsthetics so far produced. This judgment is pronounced not only with conviction but with gratitude, for the book fills a long felt need. In spite of serious and useful treatises on the subject—the learned, if intricate and difficult work of Bosanquet on the history of æsthetics, the brilliant, if one-sided, theories of Santayana, to mention only two examples—where was one to find a brief but comprehensive treatise which would embody what time and the continued studies of æstheticians have pronounced valuable in the theories of past and present, a treatise which would be, therefore, neither primarily historical nor primarily original, but which would give the consensus of modern thought in æsthetics? Perhaps the second volume of Knight's *Philosophy of the Beautiful* most nearly satisfied the need. But even here there is a tedious amount of historical material, and, particularly, the book is out of date; it does not take into account such important recent contributions as Croce's theory or the German theory of empathy. For the most part, our books in æsthetics stand in the same relation to college work as do most of those in the history of art: they are to be used as references rather than as texts.

Parker shows himself peculiarly well fitted for his task. A professor of philosophy, he is accustomed to logical and critical thinking. He is not merely inspired by some new, sensational theory, valuable as that might be in its way. To be sure, he does not lack original ideas, but they are the